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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/05/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [TS](#)
SUBJECT: AFTER INITIAL REFUSAL, GOT AUTHORIZES NEW
OPPOSITION NEWSPAPER

REF: A. TUNIS 2826

[1](#)B. TUNIS 584

Classified By: CDA a.i. David Ballard for Reasons 1.4 b and d

[1](#)1. (C) Only weeks after refusing legal opposition party Democratic Forum for Labor and Liberties (FDTL) leadership the necessary paperwork to begin the process of authorization to publish a newspaper (Ref A), the Ministry of Interior (MOI) has reversed its position and approved publication, party Secretary General Mustapha Ben Jaafar announced December 4. According to Ben Jaafar and other FDTL officials, the newspaper, "Mouwatinoun" (Citizens), will be published weekly, with a monthly supplement in French. The announcement followed weeks of pressure from domestic and international human rights organizations, as well as a communique supporting FDTL released by the French Socialist Party. (FDTL is a member of The Socialist International, a worldwide organization of socialist, social democratic, and labor parties.)

[1](#)2. (C) Although Ministry of Interior-linked newspaper al-Hadath reported December 5 that Ben Jaafar had only been given the paperwork necessary to begin the four-month review process before full authorization, party officials reported that MOI representatives told them verbally that publication could begin immediately. Ben Jaafar reported that he plans to publish the first issue of "Mouwatinoun" in January 2007. FDTL leaders have raised financial concerns about the newspaper, noting that only newspapers of political parties represented in Parliament receive GOT subsidies and suggesting that the party would rely on donations from party members to publish the newspaper.

[1](#)3. (C) In the same article announcing FDTL's approval, al-Hadath reported that the GOT-authorized Green Party for Progress (Ref B) has "submitted a dossier" requesting authorization of a new newspaper, and that approval for other political newspapers (NFI) would follow. The unauthorized Tunisia Green Party has attempted for several years to obtain authorization for a newspaper to no avail.

[1](#)4. (C) Comment: The approval and publication of a new opposition newspaper would be a significant positive development in our primary Freedom Agenda goal of increased freedom of expression. Like opposition party PDP's newspaper Al-Mowqif, Mouwatinoun is likely to be poorly funded, receive no GOT subsidies or advertising, and have a very small circulation. Nevertheless, in Tunisia's highly-controlled, sterile media environment, it will be a welcome exception and source of opposition news. End Comment.
BALLARD